



MARYLAND
LEAGUE OF
CONSERVATION
VOTERS

Kim Coble
Executive Director

2025 Board of
Directors

Patrick Miller, Chair
The Hon. Nancy Kopp,
Treasurer
Kimberly Armstrong
Caroline Baker
Joe Gill
Lynn Heller
Charles Hernick
The Hon. Steve Lafferty
Bonnie L. Norman

February 25, 2025

SUPPORT: SB 978 - Environmental Permits - Requirements for Public Participation and Impact and Burden Analyses (Cumulative Harms to Environmental Restoration for Improving Shared Health - CHERISH Our Communities Act)

Mr. Chair and Members of the Committee:

Maryland LCV is submitting this testimony to strongly support SB 978 - CHERISH Our Communities Act. We thank Senator Lam for introducing this important bill and for his leadership on this issue. The CHERISH Our Communities Act is a priority bill for Maryland LCV, as well as a priority bill for the environmental community.

Environmental justice is rooted in the principles that all communities deserve a clean and healthy environment, and those most affected have a voice in the decisions shaping their future. These principles are reflected in SB 978, which builds on years of community-driven efforts to assess the cumulative impacts of pollution. This bill addresses gaps in the Maryland Department of the Environment's (MDE) permitting authority to protect the health and well-being of communities. SB 978 seeks protections for overburdened and underserved communities, authorizing additional scrutiny for certain permits when they are proposed in these communities. This effort builds on the momentum of similar legislation—HB 24—that passed in the House of Delegates last year, reinforcing the continued commitment to ensuring environmental justice for Maryland's most vulnerable communities.

SB 978 takes the commonsense step of requiring an Existing Burden Report (EBR) for certain polluting facilities proposed in a census tract with an environmental justice (EJ) score of 75 or above, or within a 1.5-mile radius of that tract. The results of the EBR would factor into the permit decision. A census tract with an EJ score above 75 is among the top 25% most polluted and underserved in the state, making it critical that permits in these communities undergo additional screening. This approach ensures that the health and well-being of residents are prioritized and that the state fulfills its commitment to environmental justice.

The first cumulative impacts bill was proposed in Maryland in 2014. Since that time, Maryland has made some progress, including the development of the state's EJ mapping tool and requiring that some environmental justice information be included in certain types of permit applications. But we have fallen behind other states including New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, and Minnesota in implementing comprehensive and meaningful cumulative impacts laws.

We have included, below, testimonials from 5 Environmental Justice and Action Promotores of Maryland LCV's Chispa Maryland program. Chispa's Promotores are community volunteers who work tirelessly with other families in their communities to advance environmental justice. They advocate for healthy communities and a clean environment where their families can thrive and their children can reach their full potential.

Maryland LCV strongly urges a favorable report on this important bill.

Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment
Testimony on: SB 978 - CHERISH Our Communities Act
Submitting: Katie Bautista
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: February 25, 2025

Dear Chair and Committee Members,

My name is Katie Bautista, and I am a student at Hampstead Hill Academy. I live in Baltimore City, in District 41. I am writing today to express my support for SB 978 – the CHERISH Our Communities Act because this bill is crucial for protecting the health of families like mine.

I have suffered from asthma since birth, a condition that is unfortunately common in Latino communities. Many of us live in neighborhoods across Maryland that face serious health risks from multiple sources of pollution. Yet, these same communities often receive the least protections and resources to address air pollution and its harmful effects.

I also want to thank Senator Attar for meeting with us on February 17 and remind her of the commitment she made to support this important bill. This issue is personal to her as well, and I urge the rest of the Committee to stand with us and vote in favor of SB 978.

Sincerely,

Katie Bautista

Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment
Testimony on: SB 978 - CHERISH Our Communities Act
Submitting: Ingris Reyna
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: February 25, 2025

Dear Chair and Committee Members,

My name is Ingris Reyna, and I am a resident of Baltimore City in District 46 and a mother of three. I am writing today to support SB978, the CHERISH Our Communities Act because this bill is crucial for protecting the health of families like mine.

I have family members and close friends who suffer from asthma, and I live in a community deeply impacted by air pollution. Unfortunately, communities that already bear the burden of pollution continue to be subjected to even more harmful emissions, often without protection. These affected areas are disproportionately home to Latinos and communities of color, making this an urgent environmental justice issue.

SB978 is critical because it will:

- Improve the process for safeguarding the health of vulnerable communities.
- Ensure that cumulative impacts of pollution are considered when reviewing permit applications.
- Help reduce air pollution and, in turn, lower the rates of respiratory illnesses affecting our families.

I urge you to support this bill so that we can have cleaner air and a healthier future for our children. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Ingris Reyna

Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment
Testimony on: SB 978 - CHERISH Our Communities Act
Submitting: Adriana Gonzalez Mendez
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: February 25, 2025

Dear Chair and Committee Members,

My name is Adriana Gonzalez Mendez, and I have been a proud resident of Prince George's District 25 County for the past 20 years. I am a mother of four, and my youngest child suffers from asthma. I am writing to you today in full support of SB978, the CHERISH Our Communities Act, because I have seen firsthand how pollution impacts the health of our children and families.

My son's struggle with asthma has been heartbreaking, and I know I am not alone. My two nephews also suffer from asthma, and there was a time when they spent more days in the hospital than at home. Families like mine bear the burden of poor air quality, and it is our children—especially those in vulnerable communities—who pay the highest price.

SB978 is very important because it will help protect the communities most impacted by pollution, ensuring that families like mine no longer have to live in fear of the air we breathe. I urge the committee to support this bill and take a stand for the health and well-being of Maryland's children and families.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Adriana Gonzalez Mendez

Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment
Testimony on: SB 978 - CHERISH Our Communities Act
Submitting: Marta Orellana
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: February 25, 2025

Dear Chair and Committee Members,

My name is Marta Orellana, and I have been a resident of Baltimore City District 46 for the past 16 years. As a mother of two children—one of whom battles both asthma and autism—I am deeply invested in advocating for environmental justice. That is why I am writing today in strong support of SB978, the CHERISH Our Communities Act.

This bill is deeply important to me because, as I mentioned, my youngest son suffers from asthma. For too long, our communities have been left behind, neglected, and forced to bear the burdens of pollution. Families like mine continue to live in areas where harmful environmental impacts accumulate, yet we have little protection from additional pollution.

SB 978 is a critical step toward ensuring that the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) fully considers the cumulative impacts of pollution when reviewing permit applications. By supporting this bill, you are taking action to protect the most vulnerable communities from further environmental harm. This bill ensures a more thorough and just permitting process that accounts for the existing pollution burden in communities like mine, safeguarding the health of families already living in vulnerable areas and preventing further negative health impacts on children, like my son.

I urge you to support SB978 and stand with families like mine who deserve clean air, a healthier future, and stronger protections for our communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Marta Orellana

Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment
Testimony on: SB 978 - CHERISH Our Communities Act
Submitting: Veronica Gasca
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: February 25, 2025

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Veronica Gasca, and I have lived in Baltimore County District 6 for the past 19 years. I am a mother of two daughters, ages 11 and 13, and I am writing today in full support of the CHERISH Our Communities Act (SB 978).

I consider myself fortunate that my daughters enjoy good health and do not suffer from respiratory illnesses. However, we live in a community with some of the highest levels of air pollution. The quality of the air we breathe is not just a personal concern—it is a public health issue that disproportionately affects low-income communities and communities of color.

Clean air is essential to protecting the well-being of current and future generations, particularly children who are most vulnerable to pollution-related illnesses like asthma. SB 978 is a much-needed step toward environmental justice, ensuring that cumulative impacts from all pollution sources are thoroughly analyzed when the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) reviews permit applications. This comprehensive approach will help prevent further harm to our communities and hold polluters accountable.

I urge you to support SB 978 and take decisive action to safeguard the health of Maryland's families. Thank you for your time and commitment to this important issue.

Sincerely,
Veronica Gasca